

Annual Report of the  
Faculty Senate Academic Excellence Committee  
2013-2014  
Prepared by Alan Shorter, Chair

For the academic year 2013-2014, the Academic Excellence Committee (AEC) consisted of the following members:

Alan Shorter (THEA), Chair  
David Sandell (SOAN) FSEC liaison (Fall, 2013)  
Ted Legatski (MANA), FSEC liaison (Spring, 2014)  
Giridhar Akkaraju (BIOL) (Fall, 2013)  
David Bedford (SPAN)  
Greg Friedman (MATH) (Spring, 2014)  
Nadia Lahutsky (RELI)  
Thomas Moeller (FINA)  
Steve Palko (EDUC)  
Loren Spice (MATH)  
Paul Schrodt (COMM)  
Patricia Warrington (INDE)  
Jo Nell Wells (NURS)  
Scott Williams (MOLA)

*Ted Legatski served as FSEC liaison while David Sandell was on sabbatical;  
Giridhar Akkaraju served as an AEC member during Greg Friedman's sabbatical.*

At the beginning of the 2013-2014 academic year, the AEC did not receive any specific charges from the Faculty Senate Chair or Executive Committee other than attending to what we felt needed to be address. The following "Standing Charges" headings contain the activities of the AEC during the academic year 2013-2014. These reflect the changes in the charges (and the creation of the new Educational Evaluation Committee) as approved by Faculty Senate, Fall, 2013.

**SPECIFIC CHARGES:**

**1. Propose solutions to issues arising from policies, procedures, programs, and goals that affect the academic excellence of the University.**

As chair, I was approached by Chris Seekely and Jacob Greenstein of SGA's Academic Affairs Committee regarding their desire to have the date for deciding whether or not to take a class for Pass/No Credit moved later in the semester. After numerous meetings, including one with Registrar Patrick Miller in which the history of the current date was explained, I provided the SGA representatives, as well as the AEC and the Provost, with research I had done on other institutions' policies. Ultimate Provost Nowell Donovan brought the issue to the Deans with the resulting change: *The new deadline for declaring a class as Pass/No Credit*

*will be the same as the final withdrawal day. This is computed by figuring the day in which 70% of the course is completed (including exam days). It will go into effect Spring Semester, 2015.*

I also had a discussion with Jacob Greenstein (SGA) regarding the suggestion that minors in Latin, Chinese, and Dance, as well as a course in the psychology of U.S. football, be added to the curriculum. In echoing the sentiments of the Faculty Senate when Seekely and Greenstein broached this subject in FS open session, I reiterated that the first step would be to contact the specific department chairs to discuss the feasibility of these suggestions and go from there.

During the aforementioned meeting with Registrar Patrick Miller, he asked me to bring up the issue of "U" grades with the AEC. With no monetary expenditure, the Registrar's Office could make the assigning of "U" grades by faculty members available as early as the second week of classes and remain available to them throughout the semester. After discussion, the AEC was basically non-committal in regard to making a recommendation on this topic. I brought the subject before the Faculty Senate and the brief discussion that followed echoed the comments made in AEC meetings. Members seemed to have no problem with allowing faculty members to assign "U" grades earlier, as long as this was not mandatory and that people still be allowed to use them (or not) as reflected by current practice. What was of more concern to the AEC was the wording of the email informing the student that they had received a "U" grade and members expressed interest in having the language be more "muscular" and underscore the serious nature of receiving a "U" grade. Action should be taken by the student: he/she should contact the professor and resolve the situation. I am currently organizing the committee comments and will forward them to Patrick Miller.

Two resolutions were brought to the FS floor during the year. At the November 7, 2013, FS meeting, I presented the Testing Center Resolution, which was discussed, revised, and approved:

**Faculty Senate Resolution**  
***(Approved 7 November 2013)***

In light of:

- the increasing number of TCU students who have documented needs for testing accommodations,
- the ongoing need to reschedule exams for those students who have more than two finals in a 24-hour period,
- students needing make-up exams for Official University or faculty-excused absences, as well as
- students with other testing needs,

the TCU Faculty Senate calls for the Provost to direct the establishment of

a TCU Test Center and to secure funding for the space, staff and technology sufficient to support it.

At the request of Past Chair Marie Schein, I reworked and presented a resolution regarding the establishment of two language houses at TCU.

**Faculty Senate Resolution**  
*(Approved February 6, 2014)*

“The Faculty Senate supports the establishment of a German Language House and a French Language House. It also calls for the Provost to work with the Department of Modern Language Studies, the Vice-Chancellor of Student Affairs, and the Director of Housing to provide sufficient funding to support them.”

A matter was brought to the AEC's attention regarding MathJobs.org and the University's policy of not using it in faculty searches in the math department (but relying exclusively on iGreentree). My thanks to Greg Friedman and Loren Spice for following through with their Chair, Dean, and HR. Apparently HR found the arguments presented persuasive and will allow the Math Department to use MathJobs.

I was included on a string of emails originating with Bryan Lucas regarding a "sting" operation involving faculty publication in open-access journals that questioned the validity of certain publications. When this matter was brought before the AEC, the committee agreed that there needs to be some sort of resolution, but, given the differences between various disciplines, departments and/or colleges should develop their own individual policies. It was the committee's opinion that this issue may should probably be a charge of the Faculty Relations Committee, as tenured faculty members and administrators are the individuals assessing the legitimacy of publication in terms of tenure and promotion. This sentiment was conveyed to the Provost.

**2. Act as a consultative body for the Faculty Senate (FS) representative to Faculty Advisory Committee for the John V. Roach Honors College and bring relevant issues to FS.**

I personally served as a member of the Faculty Advisory Committee (FAC) this year and kept the AEC informed of our activities. I was instrumental in having the FAC reexamine and rework the Honors College mission statement. This included its credo, core values, mission, curriculum philosophy, learning outcomes, and core competencies. While there were certainly other issues the committee wished to address, several of us thought it was imperative that this core document clearly articulate the identity of the Honors College and its mission and create the vision for all other activities of the College rather than relying on a

document that merely reflected the current state of the Honors College. While this process consisted of endless "word-smithing" and realigning other Honors College documents with it, I was pleased that we were able to develop something that could be used as a guide in the future. This new document can be found at the end of this report.

In addition to the above-mentioned activity, I served as a reviewer for several proposals for the Valerie Neal Honors Research Award.

**3. Act as a consultative body for FS representative to the Coalition on Intercollegiate Athletics (COIA).**

Perhaps as a result of my neglect, there was no communication between COIA and the AEC. To my knowledge, nothing was brought forth by them in FS meetings that required our attention.

**4. Propose strategies for innovation, creativity, and rigor in university programs.**

In continuing its work on this charge from 2012-2013, the AEC had considerable discussion toward the development of its survey to assess what innovative and creative strategies are currently utilized at TCU. This work was frequently placed on the back burner, given other issues brought to the committee's attention. The AEC was still of the opinion that we need to assess current practice before recommendations are given for proposed strategies.

It was decided that the best place to start was with a survey about what department chairs and program heads currently see in their departments. Questions were developed and reassessed. Suggestions were made to streamline the survey while including options that would allow for obtaining information beyond team-teaching and other more obvious forms of creative and innovative activity at TCU.

At our final meeting of the year, I promised the AEC that I would again rework the survey and give it to AEC member Loren Spice. (Spice offered to put it in actual survey form, as I have never actually done this) I have failed to do so. I was hoping to complete it in May, send it to the AEC for its approval, then distribute it to chairs and program heads, then ultimately help to organize the feedback. Other matters have intervened, not the least of which is simply me "hitting the wall." I overextended myself and have not completed said work.

It is my intent to complete the reworking of the survey and forward it to Loren Spice (if he is still willing to put it into an actual instrument). I apologize that this matter will again be on the plate of the AEC in 2014-2015. Perhaps my sabbatical (Fall, 2014) will give me a fresher perspective on my committee work, as well as a break from my other TCU commitments.

**Document revised by the John V. Roach Honors College Faculty Advisory  
Committee during academic year 2013-2014:**



*Core Values*

The John V. Roach Honors College encourages its students to develop a deep understanding of the ideals, principles, and beliefs that guide their behavior and shape their decisions. To promote this high level of self-understanding, the John V. Roach Honors College values integrity, equity, empathy, responsibility, and courage.

*Vision*

To be a world-class, values-centered Honors College characterized by critical, creative, cultural and cross-disciplinary inquiry.

*Mission*

Dedicated to enriching the intellectual life of TCU, the John V. Roach Honors College seeks to empower, inspire, and motivate high-achieving students to become leaders in our global society. To accomplish the mission, the TCU Honors College will:

1. promote *self-discovery, critical thinking and conscientious understanding of world cultures* through rigorous academic endeavors and *creative inquiry* in the context of *big questions, great ideas, and relevant issues that transcend the curriculum.*
2. offer unique *residential, curricular, and co-curricular opportunities*, fostering a *community of scholars* for whom *vigorous engagement with local, national, and global communities* becomes a way of life.

*Curriculum Philosophy*

The curriculum in the John V. Roach Honors College offers dynamic, student-centered learning environments, where students can pursue academic excellence by confronting significant challenges that stir passions, inspire wonder, and encourage intellectual exploration. Faculty are committed to promoting active student engagement and to creating a supportive community of learners. Honors pedagogy is distinguished not by greater difficulty or additional work, but by enhanced experiences that promote heightened reflection and realization. These intellectual challenges foster in students greater depth and understanding of themselves and the world.

*Core Competencies*

Honors courses are designed to enable the student to demonstrate at least one of the following core competencies:

- 1) Critical thinking, problem solving, or creative inquiry skills (Honors Elective)
- 2) Ability to synthesize ideas across disciplines or from multiple perspectives (Honors Elective)
- 3) An understanding of world cultures and cross-cultural perspectives (Cultural Visions)

*Student Learning Outcomes*

John V. Roach Honors College Laureates will by oral and written means:

- 1) Inquire creatively, think critically, and solve problems
  - a. Develop a creative process of inquiry and synthesis.
  - b. Apply knowledge, skills and tools necessary to articulate a problem clearly.
  - c. Use broad in-depth analysis of evidence to make decisions and communicate beliefs clearly and effectively.
  - d. Argue for and develop solutions to specified problems.
  
- 2) Synthesize ideas across disciplines
  - a. Identify and access information from relevant diverse disciplines.
  - b. Explain ideas from multiple disciplines in context and evaluate relevance.
  - c. Apply knowledge from various disciplines to new situations.
  
- 3) Demonstrate an understanding of world cultures and have a cross-cultural perspective
  - a. Use tools and processes that enable accurate explanations of other cultures' mores, values, worldviews and sensitivities.
  - b. Communicate cross-cultural perspective with accurate descriptions of other cultures' mores, values, worldviews, and sensitivities.
  - c. Apply knowledge of world cultures and cross-cultural perspective to a new situation in ways that minimize potential impact of cultural bias.

## **My Suggestions for Academic Year 2014-2015**

### **AEC:**

- 1) The AEC should follow up on the progress of the Testing Center, as our resolution was passed on Feb. 6, 2014.
- 2) The AEC expressed little interest in pursuing the issue of upper divisional residency requirements. However, perhaps this is an issue that could still be pursued by the AEC in 2014-2015. Greg Friedman was chair of AEC when this was first brought to the committee and is aware of the issue.
- 3) The issue of open-access journals may be at a standstill. I would suggest communication between AEC, the Faculty Relations Committee, the FSEC, and the Provost in this regard. This appears to be a matter that affects more than just the AEC.
- 4) At the end of the Spring Semester, Greg Friedman voiced some concerns as to the academic profile and performance of honors students as compared to other students. I'm sure he could bring this forward with the AEC.

### **Faculty Senate:**

- 1) In my opinion, the website needs major attention. It is difficult to find current information on many aspects of the Faculty Senate. While I served on the FSEC, Dianna McFarland (and other FSEC members) spent a great deal of time redesigning the website, but there has been no follow-through. The most current material in the Archive, I believe, is from May, 2012. Time was spent designing specific pages for each committee, links to important information, and contact individuals in various sectors of FS. Even as a committee chair, I find it challenging to find current information crucial to running a committee. I believe Dianna McFarland may be the most knowledgeable about what was developed but not actually implemented.

Respectfully submitted,

**Alan Shorter**

Alan Shorter  
Chair, Academic Excellence Committee, 2013-2014